

# Utahns urge lawmakers to pass Gov. Gary Herbert's Medicaid expansion alternative

KSL.com / Deseret News

October 19, 2014

Link: <http://www.ksl.com/?nid=148&sid=32013767>

SALT LAKE CITY — Stacy Davis-Stanford is one of thousands of Utahns caught in the health care coverage gap.

She lost her job and her health insurance after a car accident left her with chronic pain and illness. She's now in a wheelchair. The government, she said, won't recognize her as disabled because she can't afford the medical tests that would confirm her condition.

Davis-Stanford describes her situation as in "limbo of the sick and disabled but not sick and disabled enough to get help."

She joined about 100 people Saturday night on the steps of the state Capitol urging the Republican-controlled Utah Legislature to pass Gov. Gary Herbert's Healthy Utah Plan. Holding lights and candles, they observed a moment of silence for those who died because they couldn't pay for medical care.

"We need to get this done. People are dying," said Paul Gibbs, a Utah filmmaker who organized the vigil.

About 45,000 low-income Utahns earn too much money or don't otherwise qualify for Medicaid, but don't earn enough to qualify for subsidized insurance on [healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov). For every year the state doesn't expand Medicaid, an average of 200 Utahns will lose their lives, according to Gibbs.

We need to get this done. People are dying.

—Paul Gibbs, a Utah filmmaker



Herbert introduced his plan earlier this year as an alternative to Medicaid expansion. It still needs a nod from the federal government and the Utah Legislature. The governor has said federal approval is imminent. State lawmakers will likely consider the plan in January.

About 103,700 uninsured adults in Utah — 33.5 percent of the total uninsured population — would be eligible for coverage under the program.

Arielle Spanvill, a project manager at Utah Support Advocates for Recovery Awareness, said substance abuse treatment is a forgotten part of the Affordable Care Act.

"It's easier to get heroin in Salt Lake and Utah counties than it is to get access to health care," she told the crowd.

Gibbs showed a clip from his documentary film "Entitled to Life," which tells the stories of people suffering because they can't get access to health care. He said it's time for state legislators to stop playing political games with people lives.

"This should not be a partisan issue," he said. "No one party should have a monopoly on common, human decency."

Dr. David Sundwall, who described himself as a card-carrying Republican, said Herbert's plan isn't perfect but it's a step in the right direction and state lawmakers need to approve it.

"It's a matter of fairness as far as I'm concerned," said Sundwall, a public health professor at the University of Utah School of Medicine and former state health department director. "It's the humane thing to do."